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ABSTRACT

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) was established in 1987 and charged with the mission of improving the quality of teaching and public education. The National Board certification system involves three critical elements: (1) standards setting; (2) assessment instruments; and (3) professional development. This Digest discusses the National Board's research and development activities designed to develop an assessment system that meets the NBPTS criteria. The standards setting process and assessment development and implementation processes comprise the two main components of the National Board's research and development agenda. The National Board believes that a unitary certificate suggesting proficiency in teaching all subjects to all students of all ages is unwarranted. Consequently, NBPTS is establishing standards committees in each of 30 certification fields to define standards and student age levels. The NBPTS assessment system will be performance based and will employ a broad range of strategies. The first assessment will be launched in early 1993, and the full system of National Board Certification will be completed by the 1998-1999 school year. Five references are included. (LL)

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ERIC DIGEST

NATIONAL BOARD FOR PROFESSIONAL TEACHING STANDARDS -- UPDATE

by

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National Board for Professional Teaching Standards—Update

Joan Baratz-Snowden

Background

In response to a Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy recommendation, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) was established in 1987 with the mission of improving the quality of teaching and public education (Carnegie Forum, 1986). The NBPTS is governed by a 63-member board representing the primary stakeholders in education. Teachers make up the majority of the board. NBPTS is a private, nonprofit body whose support comes from foundations, corporate grants, and federal funding.

Goals

The goals of the National Board are to establish high and rigorous standards for what teachers should know and be able to do in order to improve student learning, and to certify teachers who meet those standards. National Board certification differs from state licensing or "certification" in several critical ways. First, a state's license, required to teach within its jurisdiction, merely indicates that a licensee satisfies a minimum level of requirements, generally equivalent to entry-level ability. In contrast, national certification will be voluntary and will signify highly accomplished teaching based on a specific set of professional criteria. Second, state license standards vary from state to state, whereas National Board certification standards will be uniform across the country. Third, National Board standards are being developed through a process of teacher input that is different from that used in state licensure procedures. Certification will be awarded to those who successfully complete a series of performance-based assessments, involving both on-site and assessment-center activities (Baratz-Snowden, 1990, pp. 19-20).

The National Board certification system involves three critical elements:

- standards setting—defining what accomplished teaching practice really is; and establishing what accomplished teachers must know and be able to do;
- assessment instruments—evaluating teaching with a variety of performance measures tailored to the standards of accomplishment; and
- professional development—providing teachers with the opportunity to discuss the elements of excellent teaching and to incorporate such practice into their teaching/learning environment.

This Digest will discuss the National Board's research and development activities designed to develop an assessment system that meets the NBPTS criteria (known as APPLE), i.e.,

Administratively feasible,
Professionally acceptable,
Publicly credible,
Legally defensible, and
Economically affordable.

Standards Setting

The standards setting process and the assessment development and implementation process comprise the two main components of the National Board's research and development agenda. In 1987, the Board issued its initial policies, which included a statement about what teachers should know and be able to do. That statement delineated five general propositions about excellent teaching:

- Teachers are committed to students and their learning.
- Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students.
- Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning.
- Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience.
- Teachers are members of learning communities. (NBPTS, 1991b, pp. 13-15)

The National Board believes that a unitary certificate suggesting proficiency in teaching all subjects to all students of all ages is unwarranted. Consequently, NBPTS is establishing standards committees in each of 30 certification fields to define the standards. Student age levels are defined as follows:

- Early Childhood (ages 3-8)—Generalist
- Middle Childhood (ages 7-12)— Generalist, English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies/History
- Early and Middle Childhood (ages 3-12)—Art, Foreign Language, Guidance Counseling, Library/Media, Music, Physical Education/Health
- Early Adolescence (ages 11-15)— Generalist, English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies/History
- Adolescence and Young Adulthood (ages 14-18+)—English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies/History

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- Early Adolescence through Young Adulthood (ages 11-18+)—Art, Foreign Language, Guidance Counseling, Library/Media, Music, Physical Education/ Health, Vocational Education. (NBPTS, 1992)

To date, 14 standards committees are in place. Standards statements in the fields of Adolescence and Young Adulthood—Mathematics and Early Adolescence through Young Adulthood—Art were approved for circulation. Initial standards statements in Early Adolescence—Generalist and Early Adolescence—English Language Arts were circulated for comment in the fall of 1992. All standards statements are to be completed by 1996.

Assessment

The NBPTS assessment system will be performance based and will employ a broad range of strategies. At present, the model for assessment involves two modules, one requiring data collected in a candidate's school setting and the second requiring data collected at an assessment center. Changes may occur as a result of further assessment research activities. The National Board will vote on final procedures (NBPTS, 1991a, pp. 37-38).

The current school site module consists of portfolio documentation and on-site observation. The portfolio, developed by the candidate, might include curriculum guides, a reflective essay, student projects and essays, and attestation of teaching accomplishment from other teachers, students, and parents. Two methods of on-site observation to be explored are videotapes of classroom instruction and on-site classroom visits.

The current assessment center module focuses on structured interviews, simulations, and knowledge of subject matter and content matter pedagogy. The interviews could be developed from the materials in a teacher's portfolio, while the simulations would center on exercises measuring a candidate's skill in responding to student essays, math problems, and laboratory reports. The knowledge component would assess a candidate's knowledge of a specific discipline and the ability to teach that knowledge to students.

Contractors for all research and development activities are identified through a peer merit review process. There are three main components of National Board research and development strategies: Assessment Development Laboratories (ADLs), a Technical Analysis Group (TAG), and a Field Test Network.

The Assessment Development Laboratories develop prototype assessment packages and methods, conduct initial pilot tests, revise preliminary efforts, and develop support materials. The Technical Analysis Group reviews, synthesizes, and integrates the work of the various ADLs and advises NBPTS regarding the research and development agenda. The TAG is working with assessment contractors and the Field Test Network participants to assure valid, reliable, and bias-free assessments. The recently established Field Test Network consists of two dozen school districts and other education entities, which provide access to a nationally representative sample of teachers covering approximately 8% of the nation's elementary and secondary school teachers. The Network assists in recruiting and in professional development activities.

Professional Development

NBPTS professional development activities are an essential part of the National Board certification system. The Board has devised professional development models in cooperation with schools and districts within its Field Test Network that provide collegial opportunities for growth and change. Other plans include using Board-certified teachers as resources for candidates preparing for the assessments, collaborating with other organizations within individual discipline areas to coordinate professional development activities, and working with colleges of education to make teacher preparation more compatible with the National Board standards.

Communicating the Message

To ensure that its mission is effectively disseminated to as broad a constituency as possible, the National Board has devised a series of communication strategies including holding state and regional forums, placing public service announcements on television and radio stations nationwide, establishing a toll-free number (1-800-989-6899), and producing a videotape explaining NBPTS.

Conclusion

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards plans to launch its first assessment in early 1993 by assessing some 2,000 Early Adolescence—Generalist and Early Adolescence—English Language Arts teachers across the nation as part of its field test of the operating system. In 1994-95, assessments will be available for teachers in an additional four fields, and by the 1995-96 school year, NBPTS certification assessments should be available for two-thirds of the nation's teaching force. The full system of National Board Certification will be completed by the 1998-99 school year.

References

References identified with an EJ or ED number have been abstracted and are in the ERIC data base. Journal articles (EJ) should be available at most research libraries; documents (ED) are available in ERIC microfiche collections at more than 700 locations. Documents can also be ordered through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service: (800) 443-ERIC. For more information contact the ERIC Clearinghouse on Teacher Education, One Dupont Circle, NW, Suite 610, Washington, DC 20036-1186; (202) 293-2450.

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